

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6091

As of February 25, 2009

Title: An act relating to expanding the college board worker retraining program.

Brief Description: Expanding the college board worker retraining program.

Sponsors: Senators Keiser and Franklin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/24/09, 2/25/09 [DPF].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

Background: The Worker Retraining Program (WRP) serves the unemployed or those facing imminent layoffs. Community and technical colleges provide training in basic skills and literacy, occupational skills, vocational education, and related or supplemental instruction for apprentices. The WRP is administered by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) with advice and counsel from the Workforce Training Customer Advisory Committee. Annual plans focus on training programs that prepare students for occupations with demonstrated demand for qualified workers and lead to jobs providing a living wage. WRP plans actively involve business, government, and labor as they determine the employment demand and content of the training program. There is flexibility as to the length of participant training and program of study.

Qualified students may receive financial assistance to help with tuition, as well as the costs of child care and transportation. To qualify, a person must be eligible for or have exhausted his or her unemployment compensation benefits within the last 24 months. Dislocated workers and long-term unemployed people have priority access to the program's training and support services. Displaced homemakers, those formerly self-employed, and unemployed veterans recently separated from service may also qualify. Vulnerable workers (those who are employed but in declining occupations and have less than one year of college education plus a credential) may qualify depending upon the economic status of the local community.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Job Skills Program (JSP) brings together employers and educational institutions to provide customized employee training. Prospective and current employees of a business receiving a JSP grant are eligible for training. Eligible businesses and industries include private firms and institutions, groups, or associations concerned with commerce, trade, manufacturing, or service provisions. Public or nonprofit hospitals are also eligible. State JSP funds, combined with employer match, support four types of training: (1) new employee training for prospective employees before a new plant opens or when a company expands; (2) current employee retraining when retraining is required to prevent the dislocation of those employees; (3) current employee upgrading, enhancing productivity for advancement opportunities with greater skills and responsibilities; and (4) industry initiatives supporting development of customized training programs for several companies within an industry.

Summary of Bill: WRP funds must also be used for training programs and related support services, including financial aid, counseling, referral to retraining resources, job referral, and job development that provide funding and education for dislocated and incumbent workers in high-demand fields, including health care. In developing the plan for the use of WRP funds, the SBCTC must develop training programs that facilitate career progression in health care occupations and involve labor-management partnerships in determining the relevant skills and competencies and the design of career pathways.

The SBCTC uses existing and private resources, including training partnership contributions for long-term care workers, for the recruitment, training, and support of persons working in health care fields. The SBCTC, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB), Employment Security Department (ESD), and the training partnership work together to develop and implement the training system.

The hospital labor management training partnership must work with the SBCTC, WTECB, and ESD to develop and implement a health care career ladder.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 24, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The healthcare professions are a segment of our economy that is still growing. Many laid-off workers could benefit from training in health care fields. We need to create more entry level health care jobs by giving those already in the field the opportunity to progress up the career ladder. The bill will help workers bridge between health care professions.

OTHER: The efforts to expand worker retraining are appreciated, but additional resources will be required. The focus of the bill is too narrow. Dislocated workers should get priority with these funds. The definition of health care worker is too narrow.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Keizer, prime sponsor; Ellie Menzies, Misha Werschkul, SEIU.

OTHER: Jim Crabbe, SBCTC; Steve Lindstrom, NW Career Colleges Federation; Maddy Thompson, WTECB.